the official magazine of the 🥽 michigan municipal league

September/October 2009

Social Networking

What Can It Do for

YOUR **Community?**

Feel the eel!

Rebranding Zeeland

inside:

Facebook

Blogs

Twitter

"...we made sure the message was memorable and stood out."

—Abby deRoo, Marketing Director, City of Zeeland

Better Communities. Better Michigan.

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. Our goals are to aid them in creating desirable and unique places through legislative and judicial advocacy; to provide educational opportunities for elected and appointed officials; and to assist municipal leaders in administering community services. Our mission is that of a non-profit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs to passionately push change for better communities and a better Michigan.

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On the Cover...

Abby deRoo, marketing director for the city of Zeeland, spearheaded a branding and social networking marketing campaign for the city. Zeeland's "Feel the Zeel" project was a 2008 Community Excellence Award Regional Winner for the League's Region 3.









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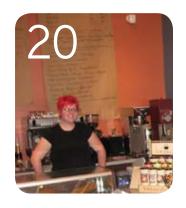
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The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League.

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To Submit Articles

The Review relies on contributions from municipal officials, consultants, legislators, League staff and others to maintain the magazine's high quality editorial content. Please contact the editor at 734-662-3246 for an editorial calendar and writer's guidelines. Information is also available at: www.mml.org/marketingkit/.

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Executive Director's Message

By Daniel P. Gilmartin

Messaging & Technology

We hear a lot these days about Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Second Life, blogging, and Wikis. These are all part of Web 2.0, the new generation of internet applications. The one thing they all have in common is they allow the sharing and spreading of information in a virtual world. Whereas traditional websites are repositories of information, the trend now is to make them interactive. Basically, social media (Web 2.0) is the sharing of words, photographs, video and audio files on the internet. It's a whole new way of communicating and the possibilities for application in local government are limitless.

If this is foreign territory to you, don't be discouraged. The great thing about Web 2.0 (besides being free), is that it is fun to explore. We have set up this issue of The Review to offer definitions, to illustrate how these tools work, and to demonstrate their impact on informing your residents and promoting your community. Some of our members are using them, most are not, but all can benefit from learning about and investigating them to find which one is right for your community.

In "How Web 2.0 Will Transform Local Government," Bill Schrier, Seattle's chief technology officer, wrote:

"Web 2.0 and government are both about building community and connecting people. Web 2.0 technologies are transforming the Internet into connected communities that allow people to interact with one another in new and distinct ways.

Government is, by its very nature, all about community. Government is a group of people—citizens or constituents—doing together what they can't do as individuals or otherwise obtain from private business. I believe most of us wouldn't want individuals or private businesses to manage street networks, maintain parks or operate police and fire departments. In the end, government is community." (Government Technology's digital communities, www. govtech.com)

These internet tools allow people to collaborate and connect like never before. The ability to innovate and share new ideas on such a mass scale is unprecedented.

The League has embarked on the Web 2.0 journey, and is able to offer our members news and resources in audio, video, and the written word. Our staff is also blogging, we use a Facebook fan page and Twitter, and we create photo albums of League events on Flickr.

A side effect of social networking is that we can't control what people are saying out there about our communities. We need to get in the game. We asked local government managers bloggers why they started blogging and what they want to accomplish (see story on page 28). Without a doubt, the purpose is to take charge of the message their citizens hear about their own community. By seizing the opportunity through free technology, you can create and report your own news.

Michigan City Manager to Head the International City/County Management Association

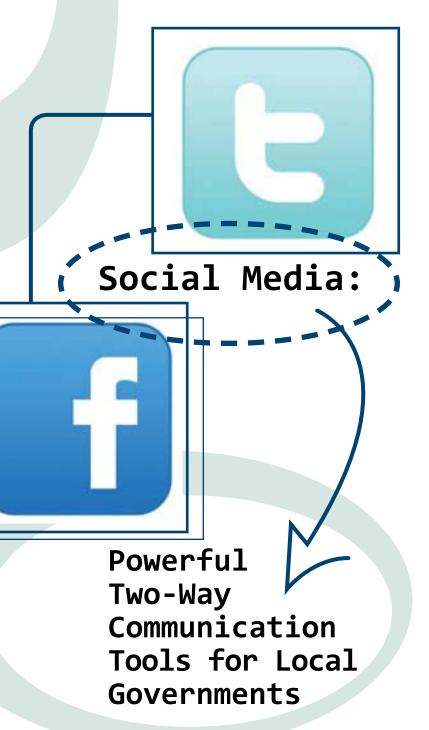
I am pleased to share with you that Darnell Earley, Saginaw city manager, was selected to be the 95th president of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Michigan is honored to have one of its own serve in this nationally recognized position. Darnell has served in local government for 24 years; prior positions include serving as city administrator in Flint and township manager in Buena Vista Charter Township. From 1998 to 2001, he served as the ICMA regional vice president. He will be sworn in on September 16, 2009, at the conclusion of ICMA's fall conference. ICMA is the professional and educational organization for chief appointed managers, administrators, and assistants in cities, towns, counties, and regional entities throughout the world.

League News... Convention 2009

Join us September 22-25 at the Kalamazoo Radisson Plaza Hotel in the heart of downtown Kalamazoo for progressive conversation on ways to make Michigan a unique and attractive place to live. With workshops on the hottest community issues plus exciting mobile workshops and outstanding speakers, the city of Kalamazoo is rolling out the red carpet for this can't-miss event! For information and online registration, visit www.mml.org.

Daniel P. Gilmartin is executive director and CEO of the League. You may contact him at 734-669-6302 or dpg@mml.org.







Two-Way Communication Is Essential to Local Government

After all, local government officials and elected leaders need to know what their citizens think before making policy and other important decisions. Conversely, citizens need to know and understand the decisions and actions of the government.

Bad Things Can Happen When This Information Exchange Breaks Down

Today, local governments have unprecedented power to engage in two-way communication with their citizens and other audiences. The power is found in a bevy of relatively new web-based "social media" tools—nearly all of which are free, by the way—found literally at the fingertips of everyone who has a mobile phone and a computer with internet access.

Social Media: Web 2.0

Even if you have no idea what social media is, you've probably heard about places on the internet with names such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, blogs, and dozens more. These places enable millions of people to share information, literally at the push of a mobile phone button or click of a computer mouse. That's basically what social media is: people having conversations and sharing words, photographs, video and audio files on the internet.

Social media, also commonly known as Web 2.0, has revolutionized how we use the World Wide Web. In the days of Web 1.0, the internet was a giant library, a place we visited to find information. Most of us still use the internet this way, but thanks to mobile phones, computers and high-speed internet access, Web 2.0 and social media allow all of us to share information.

Hundreds of millions of people of all ages—a number that continues to grow at a staggering rate—are now participating in social media forums and sites. Likewise, social media is being used by a rapidly growing number of businesses, associations, coalitions, artists, newspapers, TV stations, elected officials and their staff, political parties, tourist attractions, hospitals, and yes, even governments and governmental agencies.

Social Media Is Growing Largely for Three Reasons

First, in nearly all cases, it costs nothing to be part of a social media forum, network or group. All you have to do is sign up.

Second, traditional forms of mass communication are dying or in retreat because audience behavior is changing. Daily newspapers are folding or scaling back publication in sadly large numbers. TV viewership is also declining.

Third, because of social media, we no longer need "traditional" forms of mass communication (paid ads, direct mail, earned media stories) to inform large or targeted audiences. Traditional media are still important and powerful, but social media and our cell phones and computers have made all of us publishers of information in addition to being consumers of information.

Governments & Social Media

Governments and nonprofit organizations are lagging behind for-profit companies in using social media. And organizations of all types are light years behind the general public. It's easy to understand why. For social media to work for an organization—including governmental agencies—the organization must embrace and embed social media into its operational culture. Key members of the organization must understand and use the tools, which must also become part of daily efforts to achieve specific goals and objectives.

Among the hundreds of nonprofit trade and professional membership associations in Michigan, the Michigan Municipal League is using social media most effectively. The League foresaw the power of social media a couple of years ago, long before it became all the rage, and made it part of its culture. League staffers are "tweeting," "Facebooking" and "blogging" about various issues, including mass transit, transportation funding, protecting revenue sharing, tax reform, and more. The League also uses social media news releases to boost media coverage of important issues and events and to increase the prominence of the organization in search engines, such as Google. No other Michigan association is using social media to the League's extent—yet.

Some Common Forms of Social Media

The source for much of the information below is the online encyclopedia named "Wikipedia," which is also the largest encyclopedia in the world.

Twitter. A free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables users to send and read other users' updates known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length that are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have subscribed to them (known as followers). Twitter is a great way for local governments to keep citizens informed about local meetings and events, provide quick updates on votes or meetings that will occur, and more.

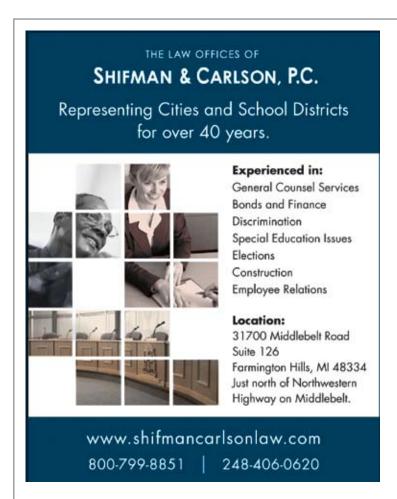
Facebook. A free-access social networking website that is operated and privately owned. Users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region to connect and interact with other people. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Local governments can use Facebook pages to announce, organize, and invite people to attend various functions. Important documents, videos, and other information can also be shared on Facebook.

Blogs. Blog is a contraction of the term web log. It is a type of website maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related

to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Local government officials can use blogs to keep citizens informed about important issues and events, changes in local policies and ordinances, to guell rumors, and much more.

YouTube. A video sharing website on which users can upload and share video clips, and view them in the MPEG-4 format. The site displays a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. Most of the content has been uploaded by individuals, although various organizations also offer materials. Unregistered users can watch the videos, while registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos. Accounts of registered users are "channels." Videos that are considered to contain potentially offensive content are available only to registered users over age 18. YouTube is a great way for local governments to post videos of important government meetings and votes, of popular local attractions and destinations, and more.

Flickr. An image and video hosting website and online community. In addition to being a popular website for users to share personal photographs, the service is widely used by bloggers as a photo repository. As of November 2008, it claims to host more than 3 billion images. Flickr is a great place for local governments to post photos of popular local attractions and destinations, groundbreakings and other positive events, and much more.





Social Media News Release (SMNR)

SMNRs are brief websites that are designed to deliver newsworthy information, in electronic formats, to traditional media and to people who participate in various online social networks. SMNRs can deliver words, audio and video files, photos, and links to other online sites and documents. SMNRs look much like electronic versions of traditional news releases, but they also make it easy to access and share the contents with other audiences, including people on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and many other social networks. They work best when paired with traditional news releases. SMNRs greatly increase the reach of newsworthy information by making it easier for people to share and access the information online.

Hundreds of politicians are using social media. In Michigan, users of Twitter receive frequent "tweets" (messages of 140 characters or less) from Governor Jennifer Granholm, Attorney General Mike Cox, and others. Some local governments are also using social media to communicate information and engage citizens in conversation. Communities with Facebook pages include Adrian, Lansing, Muskegon and Jonesville, where the manager has a blog. Adrian is also on MySpace and Twitter. Muskegon's "Downtown Muskegon" website has various tools, including a blog, videos, a YouTube channel, Muskegon Flickr (a site where photos and videos are shared), and an ability to sign-up for downtown e-news updates.

10 Links to Learn More about Social Media and Governments

These links come courtesy of blogger John Bollwitt, a principal at sixty4media, which specializes in social media consulting.

- A Beginners Guide to Twitter in Local Government www.pezholio.co.uk/2009/03/a-beginners-guideto-twitter-in-local-government/
- Councillors, Twitter, and Customer Interaction http://ideapolicy.wordpress.com/2009/02/06/ turn-a-frown-upside-down-councillors-twitter-andcustomer-interaction/
- 3. Good transparency practice: Posting your profile and your Twitter policy. See how James Cousins does it. http://jamescousins.com/twitter/
- 4. Why UK municipal councils are turning to new media; more examples. www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=1577009
- Twitter, blogs and other Web 2.0 tools revolutionizing the way some government managers take care of business http://fcw.com/ articles/2009/03/09/web-2.0-in-action.aspx
- Twitter as a tool to help humanize that "big and scary" government that likes to spend our tax dollars http://ohmygov.com/blogs/general_news/ archive/2009/03/10/op-ed-whoa-slow-your-rollgovernment-2-0-twitter-can-t-do-it-all.aspx
- Web 2.0 in government: By blocking SM sites, agencies deny access to information/ understanding how public uses the web www.dwaynetanner.com/blog/2009/03/10/web-20-in-government/
- Overview of social media and government (slide show by Jeffrey Levy, US EPA) www.slideshare. net/levyj413/social-media-and-the-govt-overview-1052855
- Stop the Posturing About Government 2.0 and Do It Already http://steveradick.com/2008/12/14/stopthe-posturing-about-government-20-and-do-italready/
- 10. How governments and businesses are seizing the power of Twitter www.washingtonpost. com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/08/AR2009030801531.html?hpid=sec-tech

Some Thoughts and Observations About Local Governments and Social Media

- Social media promotes transparency. Nearly all social media forums encourage two-way conversations. They also demand regular attention from the sponsoring organization. A government that is open and encourages frequent, candid dialogue is a government that will earn higher credibility.
- Social media makes it easy to inform many people about important events and actions. Twitter, Facebook and blogs are easy ways to let people know when and where important meetings, events, votes or other community activities will occur. Facebook and blogs, in particular, can also help government officials better understand how citizens feel about issues by sparking comments and debate.
- It costs next to nothing to launch and use social media, but
 you must tend it if you start it. If a local government starts
 a Facebook page, launches a Twitter account, or establishes
 a blog or YouTube channel, someone (or multiple people)
 must be responsible for monitoring and updating each site.
 Nothing will harm your credibility more than launching the
 tools and then ignoring them.

- Voters use social media. While general internet use continues to increase, people who join and use social media tend to have higher income and education levels—voters, in other words
- Today is tomorrow! While social media is used by all age groups, younger people are still the largest participants. For people in these age groups, mobile phones and computers have always been the primary means of communicating and getting information. They want government to meet them in their worlds.

Bottom line: citizens are going to discuss important local issues in the coffee shop, at the hairdresser, and increasingly on the internet. Local governments that enable and lead those conversations will benefit from a more informed and engaged citizenry. Better public policy, better decisions and a higher trust in government might well result.

Roger Martin and Andrea Ness are with Martin Waymire Advocacy Communications, a Lansing-based public relations firm that represents the Michigan Municipal League, the city of Allen Park, and many other clients. Among other services, the firm provides social media training to interested clients. Visit www.mwadvocacy.com for more information.

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PROMOTING COMMUNITIES VIA SOCIAL **NETWORKING:** ZEELAND CASE STUDY By Abby DeRoo JAN HE THE

Cover story

Zeeland's Feel the Zeel campaign began as a "message." In rebranding the city we revealed that we weren't the same old Zeeland anymore and we weren't about to tell our story the same old way. In launching our new, out-of-the-box brand, we knew we needed to communicate our message with a new, out-of-the-box method.

We chose a guerilla marketing approach to introduce our campaign. The very first sighting of our new brand was transmitted as a YouTube video featuring a group of people in black hoodies spray painting Feel the Zeel and large red Z!'s all over our downtown buildings and streets. This video was sent anonymously to a handful of key people in Zeeland—people that we knew would get excited about the video and send it on to friends. From there the message was forwarded on as planned. What started as a single email with an attached YouTube video turned into a viral email blitz that traveled its way around Zeeland and beyond.

Within the next few days we had created additional videos; one which offers a glimpse of Mayor Hoogland "climbing" the water tower to spray paint the new tagline at the top. Once these videos surfaced, they also proceeded to be passed around through the email network. When asked if the city was involved in the stunts, we replied "no comment."

The style in which we launched the campaign and the ambiguity of who was responsible caused quite a stir and scored Zeeland several front page headlines. A week later when the city of Zeeland finally revealed that we were, in fact, behind the spray painting stunts and that the mysterious Z! symbol that kept popping

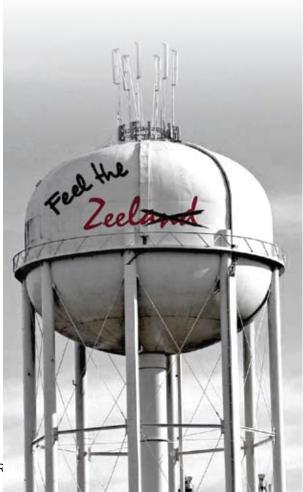




up around town was indeed the city's new logo, we followed up our guerrilla marketing blast with more traditional forms of communication: press releases, website updates, TV and radio interviews. But without the guerrilla marketing tactics and social media that was used to spread the message from the very beginning, the release of our marketing campaign and new brand wouldn't have had the same impact.

Current trends show that social networking isn't just for 'kids' anymore. Today, all generations are online. More than ever before, people are reading the newspaper online, checking the weather online, shopping online, and now, thanks to applications like Facebook, they're planning their class reunions and finding long-lost family members online.

The emphasis here is both what the message was, and how the message was received. In rebranding Zeeland, we needed to make sure the message was memorable and that it stood out. With social networking media currently being the hottest form of communication and reaching record-breaking numbers of people, there was no hesitation that it was the appropriate way to announce our new branding makeover to the community! Since launching the Feel the Zeel campaign in December of 2007, we have expanded the networks in which we use to tell our story. As part of the new brand, we have set up Feel the Zeel accounts for YouTube, Blogger, Twitter, and Flickr; all which feed directly into the feelthezeel.com website. We also maintain a Zeeland-Feel the Zeel Facebook page which is co-administered between my office and the Chamber of Commerce.



Facebook, specifically, continues to be very popular and has grown tremendously over the past year in the realm of municipal accounts. Facebook also allows people to 'join groups' or 'become fans' of organizations or causes. Wouldn't you like your residents to be 'Facebook fans' of your downtown, your parks & recreation department, or your city? It can happen. All you have to do is get online and create a Facebook page for your organization. Daily status updates, posting links, photos, videos, event invitations: it really is a clearinghouse for current goings on-or in our case, a spot to stay up-to-date on all things Zeel! You don't have to be tech savvy to do it, and you certainly don't need to have a marketing budget to maintain it. Social networking is easy and free and continues to become a widely acceptable form of casual, yet professional communication.

So, in a nutshell, social networking is instant, it's informal, it's easily accessible and it's free! And when I say 'free,' I mean free to use and free to receive! And it continues to get easier; people don't even have to be behind a desk to stay in touch anymore, thanks to iPod and Blackberry, your residents can receive your city's Facebook or Twitter updates anytime, anywhere. You really can't get much better than that! Moreover, you can even track how many people are getting your message by how many fans or followers you have. I can't think of any traditional advertising methods that provides you with information that accurate.

I don't claim to be an expert on any of this; but I do try to learn from the experts, and so far I am happy with what I have learned. I know that the Feel the Zeel message, announcement of city activities, business grand openings and special promotions are received a lot faster and a lot more effectively than they would be if I relied solely on traditional forms of advertising or communication.

To learn more about Zeeland's social networks, find us online!

Website: www.feelthezeel.com

Facebook Page: Zeeland—Feel the Zeel

Blogger: Feel the Zeel

Twitter: @feelthezeel

YouTube: fzeely

Flickr: thezeel



Abby deRoo is the marketing director for the city of Zeeland. You may reach her at 616-772-6400 x1216 or aderoo@ci.zeeland.mi.us.

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Social Media and the League

By Andrea Messinger



There is a stabilizing force at the League that drives our endless state of transformation—a commitment and passion to lead by example.

When Web 2.0 technology started changing the face of communication, we knew not to waste time getting our feet wet. Learning the technology was fun and easy and deciding which tools would best advance our communications goals proved a worthwhile challenge.

Watching our messages spread with speed and influence to new audiences and listening as the voice of Michigan communities elevates online and offline conversations alike, inspires us to continue investing time and resources to master today's communication tools.

Here's an Introduction to What's New on mml.org:

Inside 208

Advocacy Blog

As Mr. Obama illustrated in his 2008 presidential race, in today's political arena, you are only as good as the communication tools that connect you and your grassroots activists. Inside 208, a pun on our capital office address, is a blog updated by the League's advocacy staff about what's happening in their day-to-day lobbying. It keeps readers up-to-speed as events and legislation unfold, while providing a forum where they can connect further on the specific topics presented.

Get Michigan Moving Transit Blog

The League-founded Get Michigan Moving (GMM) coalition blog is devoted to spurring the conversation about improving transit in Michigan. The GMM blog is updated less frequently than Inside 208 but sports a large following. An extensive blogroll, a sidebar list of recommendations by the blogger of other blogs, connects some of the country's top transit-related blogging sites.

Follow Us on Facebook

In January 2009, on his company blog, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg wrote, "We reached another milestone: 150 million people around the world are now actively using Facebook and almost half of them are using Facebook every day. This includes people in every continent—even Antarctica. If Facebook were a country, it would be the eighth most populated in the world, just ahead of Japan, Russia and Nigeria."

Facebook offers three viral platforms that encourage bi-directional communication and exposure to this audience of 150 million: personal profiles, fan pages and group pages.

- 1. Personal Profiles: League employees are encouraged to maintain a Facebook profile so they can connect with others on a personal and professional basis and participate in Facebook.
- 2. Facebook Fan Page: The League's page, www.mml.org/facebook, intended to be an "official" web page for the organization on Facebook, is integrated with its other online tools like Flickr (www.mml.org/flickr) and Twitter (www.mml.org/twitter). Fan pages are indexed in search engines, which increase the likelihood of the League being found through a Google search. Sending messages and updates to League "fans" is quick and easy. And fans receiving those messages can easily forward the message or post the message to their Facebook profile. Unregistered people can view fan page sites. Suddenly, people outside of the League's network are being influenced by their friends and coworkers to learn more about the League.
- 3. Facebook Group Page: Pages and groups have overlapping purposes. Group pages allow you to send out "bulk invites," and are good for viral marketing. They are viewed only by registered guests, so do not show up in a Google search. Visitor statistics are not available for group pages like they are through fan pages. The League tried both, and for our purposes, the fan page is optimal.

Follow Us on Twitter

What are you doing?

Don't let its playful name fool you; Twitter is a powerhouse communication tool that can help us stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? The League tweets about things we think our "followers" would like to know. such as: "FREE Webcast for State and Local Officials: Low-Cost Financing with Clean Renewable Energy Bonds http://tinyurl.com/nd6jve." We also "follow" our followers and others on Twitter—put it all together and you get a comprehensive look at the world around you with just the right amount of detail.

Media Room (not just for media). . .

Why cater to one audience when you can influence the public directly and easily share your toolbox with stakeholders who would gladly spread your message to their networks for you? The League's media room includes traditional media advisories and press releases but also showcases easy-to-share social media releases and downloadable videos and podcasts—whether you're a local official, blogger, reporter, resident or any combination—we make sure there's something for everyone.

Social Media Release

For the PR savvy it's always about "what's next." For the League, "what's next" was the social media release. Modern day journalists are bloggers, tweeters and videographers and they are competing with anyone else who feels like telling a story. Why wouldn't we want to make their jobs easier? The social media release is everything newsmakers want in one package—easy to slice and dice, cut-and-paste text, video, audio and more. It gets the conversation going and, thanks to social bookmarking, is oh-so viral (viral messages spread quickly-compelling and easy to share, they get passed from person to person through social networks).

Follow Us on Flickr!

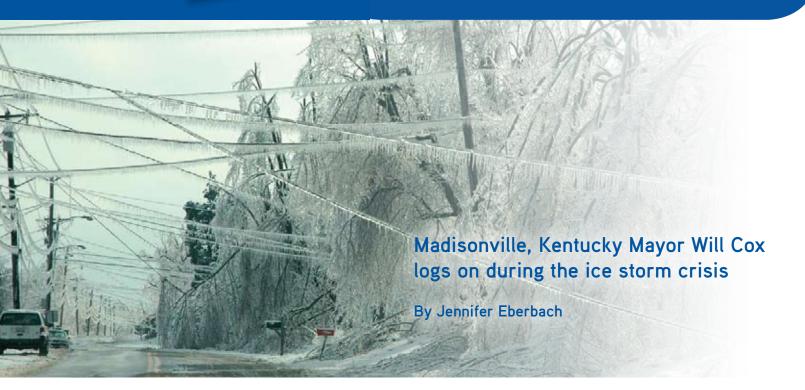
Photo Streaming

Odds are, if you've been to a League event you've had your picture taken. Now there's a place to go and find those snapshots. Flickr! is an online photo management and sharing application that's integrated into our website and Facebook page for easy search and share.

The most notable benefit to adding each of these elements to our homepage is knowing the conversation doesn't end at mml.org, in fact, it's always just the beginnings. . .



Face to facebook



"I was posting from inside

electric substations, and

I would say, if you're in a

certain neighborhood, then

next five minutes, and then,

bang, it would come on."

your power is coming on in the

ce covered Kentucky in late January 2009, causing massive power outages, downing trees and wires, and ravaging the landscape, during what was deemed "The Storm of the Century." The city of Madisonville, located in Hopkins County, was hit hard. The county's approximate 46,500 residents were left without basic services, and vast numbers lived in this darkness for weeks.

As soon as he got cell phone reception back, Madisonville

Mayor Will Cox began using his Facebook account to reach out, by posting status updates and responding to direct messages from his iPhone. His proactive use of wireless technology in response to the crisis led to him being honored with a VITA (TM) Wireless Samaritan Award by The Wireless Foundation and The Wireless Association® in June.

By Tuesday, January 27, the storm had completely knocked out power. Phone and cable lines were down, inches of ice covered everything in sight, downed trees littered the ground, and people were left in the cold as temperatures dropped into the teens and single digits at night. "We were 100-percent black," Cox remembers. "The first two days, city government was just trying to

Cox recalls, "I crawled out of my cubby hole that I had built in my bed, on Thursday morning. I picked up my cell phone and I had cell service again. I don't even know why I did it, but I logged into Facebook," which up until this point he had only used to keep in touch with friends, family, and old classmates. At 5:06 am, he posted a status update to his page, which read, "Will Cox is bent but NOT broken!"

To his surprise, the response was immediate. "Within a matter of what seemed like minutes to me, people instantly started responding to that post," Cox reports. Since many Madisonville residents were still without cell service or

power, most of the initial feedback came from worried loved ones living elsewhere or residents who had left town during the storm. As residents got services back, "they started chiming in," he says, adding, "everyone was starving for information."

A single local radio station, WFMW (730 AM), which had a generator, stayed on the air. Other than that, Facebook became the best option to get information out. Cox remembers, "We would go in with candles

or flashlights, and the only thing running was the broadcast board. Sometimes I would be sitting in the radio booth at three o'clock in the morning and updating my Facebook page at the same time."

"We got some TV coverage, but nobody locally could see it because nobody had any power. Plus, the trees had torn down all of the cable lines. At the local level, it was Facebook and that one radio station, and that was it," Cox said.

survive," he said.

Emergency Status Updates, In Real Time

Over the course of the following weeks, Cox utilized Facebook to give real-time updates on what was being done to restore power, quell rumors and paranoia, and provide reassurance. In some cases, frightened loved ones contacted the mayor directly through his Facebook account pleading for wellbeing checks on friends and family who they had not heard from, fearing for their safety.

In other cases, Cox used Facebook to stop rumors from flying. For example, he wrote, "Will Cox: is chasing silly rumors, the newest being that we are evacuating the town. NO evacuation is planned." During a crisis, "the last thing we want is panic,"

he says, adding, "we were not going to let these rumors get out of control. So when we got one, I would post a response to it, and I would try to make a joke out of it to make it sound ridiculous."

As word spread that the mayor was posting updates in real time, his page became a centralized resource for people to find reliable information about the progress of utility crews, advice about keeping safe, announcements about school closings, and other critical information. During the course of the storm, he added over 200 new friends. Since these updates were coming from the mayor, "People knew that it was good, solid information," he says.

"I was posting from inside electric substations, and I would say, if you're in a certain neighborhood, then your power is coming on in the next five minutes, and then, bang, it would come on," Cox recalls, giving an example of how real-time communication with his citizens gave his words undeniable credibility. Facebook "helped the community know that we were working. Even if you were in a neighborhood that wasn't going to get power for another week, you knew that we were working our way towards you and that we weren't just sitting at city hall eating donuts," he says.

Mayor Cox (right) surveying ice storm damage.

From his perspective, real-time feedback from citizens "was encouraging," he says. "We got good feedback that kept us energized and operating with a sense of urgency."

Lessons Learned

"I had a rash of friend requests

from high school and community

college kids," which gave him the

impression that young people are

the Mayor, that's so cool. If it helps

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in public service, and gives them

a greater understanding of city

government and government in

general, than that's fantastic."

saying, "Look, I'm buddies with

The end of the ice storm crisis did not end the mayor's infatuation with Facebook. Rather, his experience using the tool inspired him to continue posting status updates, in order to keep citizens informed and engaged in civic discourse. To this day, Cox's personal Facebook page, as well as the city of Madisonville's fan page, keeps residents informed on a daily basis, and they provide a means through which city officials can collect feedback from citizens.

According to Cox, "Public officials always struggle with how to get information out to their citizens. Citizens are pulled in so many directions in their daily lives that sometimes you wonder if they are paying attention. You figure that they are, but you don't get a lot of feedback at the time." The mayor admits that some of the comments people post on the pages are negative, "but that's good because you can see where you need to do better," he says.

Cox also credits Facebook with driving media attention. For example, during the ice storm, the Kentucky League of Cities started following the mayor's

page and drafted a press release that caught the attention of major news stations. "The work we were doing with Facebook and our communication efforts was what helped break us through the other 100 communities in Kentucky that were struggling with the same thing, trying to get their word out," he says.

Facebook also "puts you in contact with a whole new generation. Some of the high school kids and college kids don't even really use their email anymore. They text and they use Facebook," he relates, adding, "I had a rash of friend requests from high school and community college kids," which gave him the impression that young people are saying, "Look, I'm buddies with the mayor, that's so cool," he laughs. "If it helps get a younger generation involved in public service, and gives them a greater understanding of city government and government in general, than that's fantastic," he concludes.

According to Cox, "If you are a city official, you are crazy not to do it. I'm a huge believer now."

Jennifer Eberbach is a freelance journalist and professional copywriter. You may contact her at 734-929-2964 or jen@jenthewriter.info. Visit her online at www.jenthewriter.info

Muskegon 2.0 Nooloolooloolo Nolooloolooloolo

Muskegon, Michigan's downtown website, www.downtownmuskegon.org, exemplifies how a crisp, user-friendly web interface with dynamic, up-to-date content, and the utilization of multimedia and social networking features can help cities achieve their promotional goals. As the web is reaching its maturity, it is critical for cities to harness its power and take advantage of the opportunities that it creates for reaching internet users and keeping their attention.

The website is run by Muskegon Main Street, a non-profit that set up the site after being designated as a Michigan Main Street program by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority five years ago. It features updated news stories on what is happening downtown, a downtown blog, links to subscribe to a biweekly email newsletter, a live downtown development webcam, a regularly refreshed events calendar, an interactive map, and links to external social networking sites, including YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, and Facebook.

The website is also packed with information about living, working, and moving to Muskegon, including commercial property listings, resources for home buyers, information about incentives, and a downtown business directory. However, its easily navigable structure, originally designed by Muskegon-based design firm Fineline Creative, includes drop down menus that neatly organize this information without overwhelming visitors by splashing it all over the main content of the front page.

"The front page is really important," explains Muskegon Main Street Manager Dan Rinsema-Sybenga, who administers the website. Upon clicking on the website, visitors are immediately greeted with dynamic content. "We have to make sure that we are capturing them, so that they don't stray," he says.

Reaching Out and Drawing Them Back In

According to Rinsema-Sybenga, networking tools like blogs with RSS feeds, email newsletters, and social networking sites are useful because they grab people's attention and encourage them to link back to the main content of the website in order to find out more about Muskegon. "You still need to have your main website, because that's the hub or central anchor. We see our downtown website as the authoritative place, and everything else goes out from there," he says, however, "it works well to integrate these different features."











C Bike Time

C Unity Fest

Other?

C Taste of MKG





Complete photo gallery 7/13-15 - Wood Cut Class 7/14 - Raptor Rehab 7/15 - Invention Day 7/17 - Party in the Park 7/17-19 - <u>Bike Time</u> 7/18 - Vintage Boat Show Many more events Email E-News or RSS 7/6 LaBrae's Shoes

Downtown Muskegon in the News

7/4 - Summer Celebration: It's about community Read more.

6/29 - Development still alive in downtown Muskegon Read more.

6/22 - Sunny skies, hungry appetites for Taste Read more.

6/16 - Sidock Group's building certified 'green' Read more.

6/14 - Cole's cooks up 150-inch loaf of garlic bread Read more.

6/14 - Muskegon Yoga Center opens downtown Read more.

6/9 - Cole's to bake world's largest garlic bread Read more.

5/31 - Downtown Subway sandwich shop planned Read more. More recent news stories

Third Street Promenade

Downtown Social Networks

Shop Downtown Muskegon

i copie dollit divvayo clieck back to your olie, juot becaud they are too busy," Rinsema-Sybenga says, however, "by them being able to be updated through RSS, Facebook, their YouTube subscriptions, or anything like that, when you post something new, they'll be notified. It's a great way to remind them and push them back to the website."

The incorporation of multimedia is another significant feature of the website, which impresses Jason Piasecki, CEO of Muskegon-based multimedia firm Qonverge, who has served on Muskegon Main Street's Promotions Committee. He sees

"People don't always check back to your site, just because they are too busy," however "by them being able to be updated through RSS, Facebook, their Youtube subscriptions, or anything like that, when you post something new, they'll be notified. It's a great way to remind them and push them back to the website."

—Dan Rinsema-Sybenga, Michigan Main Street Manager

Click here, includes parking website to inform people about downtown because, "different people respond to different types of media," he said; some people prefer to read articles, others are much more visual.

One of the most popular features on the website is a development webcam, which shows real-time video of downtown Muskegon. Rinsema-Sybenga reports that the webcam regularly receives at least 1,200-1,300 views every month, and it is widely posted and linked across the internet. Other popular features are an interactive map, the blog, and the events calendar, which along with the business directory and commercial property listings, receive the most attention. "These are the things on the site that have definitely been worthwhile to build because people come back to the site regularly. We can count on page views from them every month, and keeping them up to date is not that difficult," he explains.

No Need to Reinvent the Wheel

The onslaught of today's newer web technologies may seem intimidating at first, especially if you are trying to incorporate them into an already busy promotional schedule. It may be difficult for some to take the plunge into the waters of blogging, posting, and sharing links without firsthand knowledge of what it takes to stay afloat.

The city of Muskegon's City Clerk Ann Becker sees value in spreading information online, while keeping it practical in terms of time management. She relates, "When I actually go out there on Craigslist, or Facebook, or anything like that, all I do is write a little blurb about whatever it is I want people to know about, and I put a link back to our website to the exact

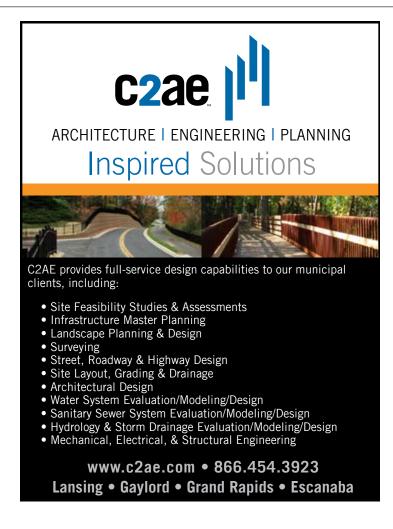
Level 6 owner Joe Lalonde talks with consultant Scott Day on how to improve merchandising to increase sales, as part of a training provided by Michigan Main Street.

page that I want people to look at. All I'm trying to do is direct traffic to our website. I'm not recreating the wheel, and I'm not sitting there typing a ton of things," she explains.

Becker admits, "In the beginning, when you first start, it does take up a lot of time, especially if you don't know how to do it and have to learn it yourself. There is a learning curve you go through." However, once she got the hang of it, "it's just a matter of everyday life, and it's actually very simple. I find that it doesn't take up too much of my time at all."

For Rinsema-Sybenga, time management is a major factor in his decisions about what web technologies to incorporate into his weekly routine. "I think you just have to look at each type of technology and evaluate how it's useful, and how it's actually going to be used. It all comes down to the fact that there is a lot to do, and you have to ask yourself, what's the





best time spent in terms of a return on your investment of time?"

His solution to spreading the word about downtown Muskegon, while keeping it practical, is to spend the greatest amount of effort and time compiling quality information to publish in a biweekly email newsletter. According to Rinsema-Sybenga, "I don't spend a lot of time updating our status on Facebook or Twitter, but I do try to get things out there that all of those fans, followers, or subscribers are going to get on a regular basis."

Muskegon Main Street follows the National Main Street model, which calls for marketing and promotions to be incorporated into the organization's yearly work plan. "Websites definitely fall under the category of promotions," he says. Having a comprehensive website and web presence, "makes it impossible for folks to say that they can't find out about Muskegon. You are giving people the tools they need to make good decisions. It gives you a chance to make sure that all of the information is there and to present it fairly and accurately," he concludes.

Jennifer Eberbach is a freelance journalist and professional copywriter. You may contact her at 734-929-2964 or jen@jenthewriter.info. Visit her online at www.jenthewriter.info.





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I Am Your Customer, and It's Really Nice to Meet You

By Marianna Hayes

he topic of social media and local government is a vast one. It can potentially affect every corner of governmental operations and relations in a positive way—potentially saving thousands of dollars and immensely improving productivity. Books can, and should, be written on this topic.

As a marketing and communications advisor to communities and their small businesses, I see both sides of this coin on a daily basis. Here is the problem we see with most municipal communication: You don't speak my language.



Who Am I?

I'm the mom who lives near downtown and takes my kids to play in your parks. I'm the business or government employee downtown. I'm the fellow just driving through or the retirees from the next town over meeting at your local café for lunch. I like farmer's markets. I'm an out-of-towner looking for a weekend getaway—or my summer vacation spot. I live in your "trade area." I graduated from your local high school and haven't been back. I like to shop local. My parents live there now. I'm looking at real estate or to start a business in your city. I voted for you last election—or I didn't—but I might next election. I spend money inside your city limits—or I might decide to spend money there in the next 12 months.

I am your customer, and it's really nice to meet you.

Who Are You?

Before you consider a dive into the world of social media, you need to be able to answer this question: Who are you? The answer should summarize the essence of your local culture, your reputation and your goals for the future. It is the experience that is had by all who come in contact with your community.

What is your reputation? What experience do you sell? What do people believe, think, and feel about your community? Why do they want to be there? How do you make sure they continue believing, thinking and feeling that way? If you don't know who you are or why anyone cares about you, then how can you communicate with me, much less have a relationship with me?







Once you know who you are, we can build a relationship because we can talk, and find out where we have mutual interests and can help each other out. A relationship, after all, is a two-way street. It is one in which we get to know one another well enough over time so that we may speak each other's language, laugh together, celebrate together, mourn together, work together...create history together.

This bears re-stating: your customers are the ones that pay the bills. They generate sales tax, purchase real property, and invest in businesses. You can either endure an arduous acquaintance with them, or you can build a relationship based on trust that leaves them full of over-flowing goodwill that flows from their pocketbooks and the pocketbooks of everyone they know.

But how does that work? How can a community's leaders possibly build a "relationship" with the broad and diverse bunch of folks who live, work or visit on an annual basis?

Social media differs from traditional media in that anyone can create, comment and add to social media content as opposed to traditional media like newspaper ads and vanilla websites where information is pushed or forced on the consumer. Social media is a natural breeding ground for building and nurturing relationships.

The best news you'll hear all day is this: the tools of social media are FREE to use. Social media are technology tools that include blogging software, podcast tools, message

boards, wiki software, virtual communities and networking tools. Some of the most frequent and applicable opportunities for social media involvement for municipal outreach purposes include Wordpress.org hosted blogs, commenting on existing local blogs, Facebook pages and participation, Twitter, LinkedIn, and social bookmarking sites like Digg or StumbleUpon.

But, you must remember, social media is still just a media: a medium used to carry a message from one point to another. Should your message lack value or target the wrong recipient, social media will fail. Just being "present" on these media does not guarantee success. It's not enough to use the tools like you want to use them—or the way that you understand them.

Each community is different, so your community's needs for these tools will differ. As such, each community should engage in the development of a "social media strategy" that will identify the social media tools, message and target audience for the community's efforts. In our experience, such a strategy saves hours of time and produces quick, measurable results. It works because a solid strategy forces you to use the tools that your customer wants you to use—in the way that the customer needs and wants to use them.



Marianna speaking in Marquette, MI. Marianna has successfully coached hundreds of small business owners, community leaders, Main Street directors, and business development organizations across the U.S.

In addition, each community should adopt a loose set of "social media guidelines" to guide social media usage and monitoring for all community leaders and employees. Social media is here to stay, so it's best to empower employees rather than restrict them. Guide them in the right direction and allow them to propel your community forward.

Get Started

The best advice is to get your feet wet and start listening. Monitoring social media (blogs, Facebook and Twitter are a good place to start) will give you an idea of how your community relates and offer leads to finding target customers outside of your community that were previously unknown through traditional channels. While listening, develop your social media strategy, and then jump in. Go all in—don't hold back. Participate on a daily basis and be willing to learn as you go.

A decade ago, businesses questioned the internet's value. Many of those same feelings are circulating today regarding social media—but they won't be for long. Opportunity passes each day that you don't embrace the technology that your customers are using. Don't be the last community on board. Carpe diem.

Marianna Hayes is president of HALO Business Advisors. You may reach her at 662-392-1179 or mhayes@halobusiness.com, or visit www.halobusiness.com, www.facebook.com/mariannahayes, and www.twitter.com/resultsrev.



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The League Asks...

What is the top technological advance your municipality has made and what was the result?

Coldwater is most fortunate to own its electric and cable communications systems, which gives it advantages above other communities who do not. The cable communication system especially has allowed for technological advances for our city. First, city council meetings have gone paperless. Each councilmember is assigned an up-to-date laptop computer and agendas and informational materials are provided to each councilmember as well as any citizen who is interested.

The cable system also allows our utility users to pay bills electronically. This is a recent development and is being used by many of our citizens. Wide-spread usage of the internet has taken place in the community. Recently, wireless service was extended to our downtown business area. It is not uncommon to see people sitting in coffee houses, restaurants, and parks surfing the net. Downtown businesses have also found this service beneficial.

Eugene Wallace, Mayor City of Coldwater, pop. 12,967

Are you on Facebook?

Facebook has become another "media" tool in which to reach and engage people in our community and to garner interest in Buchanan. As the city manager, I am always looking for ways to brag about "Bucktown." When I started the fan page, I didn't anticipate that membership would amount to over 10 percent of our population—it really surprised me in a positive manner.

I love looking at fan demographics—it is a great makeup, from youth to seniors. In addition, those that grew up here are finding it a welcome reprieve to be able to click on the link and see what's going on in their hometown; who's still here, what's changed and what's new.

It's also been a great tool to get information about upcoming events out fast to a larger, broader audience. Not to mention, it's free. When we have an event coming up, I love the ability to send out an event notice to the whole group of fans, without having to send formal invites—another free function. All in all, Facebook is a great way to promote Buchanan; who we are and what we are doing, to everyone and anyone who will listen!

Meg Mullendore, City Manager City of Buchanan, pop. 4,681 On April 6, 2009, we launched the city of Clawson's Facebook fan page. Postings have been limited to events of general interest in the city and good news about businesses and residents from all media sources. The results have been quite surprising. Within six weeks, more than 500 people signed on as fans. Today that number has reached 621. The fan page has a statistical page that has shown the vast majority of fans are local to Clawson and more than 70 percent of the fans are age 24-54, with the majority of this group 25-34.

Feedback has been slow, but people are making inquiries about the happenings in the city and are beginning to post events that do not make the news. The comments we receive are very positive and the site has been accepted to a level that I did not anticipate. Daily postings take about 15 minutes, and if there is no news, I make it a point to post something (even if it is only to note things like the weather is great for the family to come to downtown and enjoy the cafés or other venues in the city). We have only received one comment that could be considered controversial—it was regarding taxes. It was removed with no negative effect. The community has accepted the fact that this site fits the norms of their personal sites and wants it to be truly a social networking site and a means to enhance a sense of community. Finally, the number of former residents throughout the country that follow this site and offer feedback about their time in Clawson surprises me.

Richard Haberman, City Manager City of Clawson, pop 12,732



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009 THE REVIEW



Peter E. Auger, Manager

City of Auburn Hills, pop. 19, 837 www.auburnhillsblog.org

I think blogs are another way to communicate at the local government level and put a face on the faceless bureaucrat. There are enough negative information sources out there—sometimes people like to hear what is really going on.

I limit my blog time to fifteen minutes a day. Just as we find ourselves busy, so are the people who read blogs. I keep it short (maybe a couple of paragraphs). If they want more information, they usually contact me and we go from there. We don't use our site for public discourse. I receive people's comments and normally communicate with them on an individual basis.

It's funny—blogs are almost "old school" now. With newer forms of social networking available, we are learning how to maximize the technology trends. If we don't like the story people are telling about us, we'd better get in the game.

I have received very good input from elected officials and employees alike. They say it keeps them informed at levels they have not received before. I do believe the "city manager blogosphere" helps open the door to better communication with citizens, the business world, elected officials, peers and employees.

Steven Patrick, Manager

City of Coopersville, pop. 3,910 www.cityofcoopersville.com

The two main reasons that prompted us to start a blog were 1) misinformation about anything city related, and 2) the retreat of the press's coverage of our city. The Grand Rapids Press dramatically reduced local coverage, as did our regional newspaper The Advance. Our local newspaper, The Coopersville Observer, still covers local

news but since it only goes to press every two weeks timeliness became an issue especially with the other two resizing.

My intent is to provide facts, give a historical perspective, and to explain city policy or rationale for past and future actions. Through blogging, our side of the story is getting out—factual information and a more objective explanation of an issue is conveyed. In response, we've had positive comments, but the blog is still fairly new and its existence is probably unknown to many at this time.

I have to admit, it does take time to write. Due to budget constraints, a few administrative positions are still vacant and work/responsibilities continue to increase—however, it is a valuable investment because it provides another communication tool. In addition, we direct people to the blog for more information as a way to increase awareness.

Ted Staton, Manager

City of East Lansing, pop. 46,525 www.cityofeastlansing.com/Home/Modules/CityBlog/CityManagersBlog

I began "seriously" blogging in early 2008 after learning about Web 2.0 viral communication. I blog twice weekly, on the city's budget, staff, community events, special tributes, the value of students in our community and so on. One of the most widely read was pursuant to the May 9th Executive Order on the state's budget shortfall and coinciding League press event. Readership has been increasing, and our most recent stats show about 1,000 hits for each of the past three months.

I think the most important aspect of the blog is its accessibility—it says the manager is willing to share challenges and triumphs and entertains comment or feedback. As we become more mired in budget challenges, communicating with the community about the impact of revenue shortfalls

will be a critical educational and, dare I say, political tool—we need every one we can get!

The other great thing about the blog is the ability to post to Facebook—now it reaches a broad audience. I don't get much commenting, but we do require a name so that may impact the number of comments we get.

The blog takes about a half hour to write—I think it's time well spent.

Adam Smith, Manager

Village of Jonesville, pop. 2,337 blog.jonesville.org

In our last community survey, residents told us they wanted to be better informed. For \$500 in development costs, the blog acts as a great, low-cost communication tool. Over the past six months we went from 100 hits on the first blog to 700, which is impressive considering our population is about 2,300. In July, we launched a new website designed to drive more traffic to the blog, which now incorporates photos and website links. The goal is to make our own news using the most accurate information (since newspapers don't always report accurate information).

We monitor comments and acknowledge most legitimate questions or concerns publicly which creates a great public forum for discussion. The most difficult part is not the technology, but the time. The goal is to build up to bi-weekly postings.

In addition to the blog, Jonesville has been working with a local youth rotary club to promote and develop its presence on Facebook. The community strategically opted for a group page verses a fan page because they wanted it to be about people connecting with each other. The Facebook group is keeping residents, their relatives, and college students connected in a circle of more than 600 friends.

Eric Zuzga, Manager

Village of Quincy, pop. 1,701 quincymanager.blogspot.com

The blog is just starting, but I see it, along with Facebook, email blasts, newsletters, and our new website all as pieces of our communication efforts. I think we are going to reach people we haven't reached in the past. By using these methods of communication, we are closer to reaching all facets of the population. In today's tough budget environment, it is imperative that we communicate with the public and the social networks allow us to do that in an almost free way.

Since we started our email blasts, we have heard from people we have never heard from before. The almost instantaneous communication is great, especially with the large construction project we had over the summer.

Mark D. Slown, Manager

City of Rogers City, pop. 3,322 rogerscity.com/blog/2009/01/michigan-main-street-program.html

I think my blog has helped to open communications, build a sense of community, and connect our geographically separate community to a wider audience. I'll admit that I shamelessly promote Rogers City. Rogers City is a great small town, but because we are geographically isolated, we are off the radar screen for many people.

Since I started the blog, people from Chicago, IL; Dayton, OH; Sanibel, FL; and Pasadena, CA, have contacted me about Rogers City. The most difficult thing is to find time every day to write, but there is no lack of good material because there is so much going on. I can get useful information out—though I don't know how many people read it. I do think it has increased citizens' sense of pride in their community—they are amazed at all that is going on.

Tom Gromek, Manager

Village of Roscommon, pop. 1,133 www.roscommonmanager.blogspot.com

I started my blog in May of 2008 by giving updates on events, and sharing insight on happenings in and around the village. I recently added the ability for residents to post comments. While residents have commented to me in person about certain blog posts, the online feedback has been lacking. I think it will take time to establish the blog as a major information source.

We link to my blog on the village website, and the blog site (blogger.com) is free, so it costs the village nothing. I try to update once a week. It gives people outside the community a way to receive local news and keep in touch with the community.

It really is a fun, neat tool that takes up little time, but can reach a wide audience. I promote it as often as possible. Several months ago, I also started a Facebook fan page for the village, and it has over 400 fans. It is more interactive than the blog. I send fans updates on village business, and they receive it instantly. I know that social networking sites are very powerful tools, and I want Roscommon to utilize these tools to improve our community—not stay stuck in the past.

"With newer forms of social networking available, we are learning how to maximize the technology trends."

111th Michigan Municipal League Convention

September 22-25 ~ Radisson Hotel, Kalamazoo

Kalamazoo

Kalamazoo is a city dedicated to the development of its community, education of its citizens, and values to build its future. With thriving businesses in the pharmaceutical and orthopedics industry, the community sustains a diverse workforce. Join us at the Kalamazoo Radisson Plaza Hotel in the heart of downtown Kalamazoo for progressive conversation on ways to make Michigan a unique and attractive place to live.

General Sessions

Keynote Speakers

The 111th League Annual Convention is a great event for Michigan local government officials. Our keynote presenters will set the tone for a dynamic, must-attend Convention.



MLGMA Colloquium Presentation
Civic Engagement: Our Public as Partners Not Enemies
Ed Everett

Tuesday, September 22, 4:30 pm

Learn from a very successful practitioner how civic engagement can help both staff and elected officials deal with such tough issues as budget cuts, land use, and traffic issues. Civic engagement can actually make your job easier not harder.



Places and Spaces! Fred Kent Wednesday, September 23, 8:30 am

The importance of "place" cannot be overemphasized. It makes up the fabric of our public lives that connects us to the rest of the community. Fred Kent, founder and president of Project for Public Spaces will help us understand how well-created public spaces result in vibrant places. He will share ideas, big and small, on how you can create a vital community that will enrich people's daily lives.



Bringing the World Back to Michigan Sam Singh

Thursday, September 24, 9:00 am

Former East Lansing Mayor Sam Singh will recount his recent 18-month travels around the world and discuss what cities across the world are doing to remain vibrant in the 21st century.



State and Federal Affairs Update

Thursday, September 24, 3:00-4:15 pm

The League's state and federal affairs team will speak on several key legislative issues currently facing Michigan's communities. Audience members will have an opportunity to ask questions on the various topics following the presentation.



The Seven Rules of Admiral Rickover

Gordon Graham

Friday, September 25, 8:30 am

The "father of the nuclear navy" had some thoughts in the early '50s on how to deal with complex, high-risk operations—like building a nuclear fleet. His "seven rules" have made the nuclear navy a HRO (high reliability organization) and these principles have direct application to what you do in government operations.

Convention General Information

Parade of Flags

Wednesday, September 23, 8:30 am

Participate in this spectacular event and proudly show your colors with other officials from across the state. Carry your flag in the parade and leave it on display throughout the Convention. To participate, please check "yes" on the Convention registration form.

Fall Expo

Thursday, September 24, 7:30 am-3:00 pm

Visit the Fall Expo to meet with exhibitors offering specialized products and services to Michigan local government.

Housing

Host Hotel – Radisson Plaza Hotel 100 West Michigan Ave

Kalamazoo, Michigan, 49007 Phone: 269-343-3333

www.radisson.com/kalamazoomi

Housing Reservation Process

Housing reservations will only be accepted for registered Convention attendees by faxing the housing form with a personalized registration code. After registering for Convention, a confirmation email will be sent within 48 hours. The confirmation email will contain your registration information, a link to the form, and your personalized housing registration code.

This process has been put in place to deter overbooking of rooms and allows registered attendees to take full advantage of the Convention rate and secure housing in the host hotel. This also protects the League from paying attrition fees on rooms that are reserved and cancelled after the Convention rate is closed, and allows us to keep our registration fees lower.

Housing Rates

Single or double: \$130 (plus a 5% accommodation tax)
Additional persons in the room will be at the rate of \$10 per person, per night.

Hotel Parking Rates

\$6.00/day for registered guests; \$1.15/hour for non-registered guests

New this year:

Register online at www.mml.org

With workshops on the hottest community issues plus exciting mobile workshops and outstanding speakers, the city of Kalamazoo is rolling out the red carpet for this can't-miss event!

111th League Convention Overview

Tuesday, September 22, 2009

10:00 amGovernance Committee Meeting1:00-4:00 pmPre-Convention Workshops2:00 pmBoard of Trustees Meeting

2:00-7:00 pm Registration Open

3:30-4:15 pm First-Time Attendee Orientation 4:30-5:30 pm Welcoming General Session

MLGMA Colloquium Presentation-

Ed Everett

6:00-10:00 pm Host City Reception

Wednesday, September 23, 2009

7:00 am-6:00 pm Registration Hours
7:15-8:15 am MWIMG Breakfast
7:30-8:15 am Continental Breakfast
8:30-10:45 am General Session
Parade of Flags

Community Excellence Award

Presentations

11:00 am-12:00 pm Annual Business Meeting 12:15-1:30 pm Networking Lunch

12:15-1:30 pm Michigan Black Caucus of Local Elected

Officials Meeting

1:45-3:00 pm Concurrent Sessions 3:00-3:30 pm Networking Break 3:30-4:45 pm Concurrent Sessions 5:00-6:30 pm Vendor Reception—Expo hall

8:00 pm Vendor Hospitality Suites

Thursday, September 24, 2009

7:00 am-6:30 pm Registration Hours

7:30-8:30 am Continental Breakfast in the Expo Hall

7:30 am-3:00 pm Expo Hall Open
7:30 am-3:00 pm Silent Auction Bidding
9:00-10:15 am General Session—Sam Singh

10:15-10:30 am Networking Break 10:30-11:45 am Concurrent Sessions

11:45 am-1:30 pm Affiliate Organization Lunches

1:30-2:45 pm Concurrent Sessions 2:45-3:00 pm Networking Break

3:00-4:15 pm General Session: State and Federal

Affairs Update

6:00-8:30 pm Reception and Annual Awards Banquet

9:00-11:00 pm Night in the 'Zoo

Friday, September 25, 2009

8:30-10:00 am Closing Breakfast—Gordon Graham

Community Excellence Award "Race for

the Cup" Winner Announced

Pre-Convention Education Seminars

Grant Seeking Action Steps 101— Surviving in Economic Chaos

9:00 am - 12:00 pm

This session will cover the best picks for municipal funding sources; private sector funding for smaller (non-capital) needs; using private sector grants to free up your general operating budget expenditures; the pros and cons of community partnerships; federal and state grant funding resources; using evidence-based research to support your Statement of Need and Project Design; and grant writing exercises. The session also includes an in-kind/matching funds brainstorming session.

Blight Court—How to Create an Administrative Hearings Bureau

1:00 - 4:00 pm

Learn about developing an Administrative Hearings Bureau as a mechanism for rebuilding your community. This session offers insight into drafting an ordinance, creating administrative procedures, selecting quality hearings officers, and gaining quicker compliance on blight violations. You will hear from municipal employees working with an Administrative Hearings Bureau system as to this functional alternative to district court practice.

Education Seminar Information

Date: Tuesday, September 22, 2009

Location: Kalamazoo Radisson Plaza Hotel

100 W. Michigan Ave. Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Cost: Half-Day

Full member communities, \$70 Nonmember communities, \$125 Add \$35 if received after 9/11/09

Cost: Full Day

Full member communities, \$135 Nonmember communities, \$180 Add \$35 if received after 9/11/09

Register online at www.mml.org

Making Michigan a Box Office Hit

1:00 - 4:00 pm

Lights, Camera, Action! Recently approved tax incentives have given Michigan communities a leg up in the movie-making business. Learn how to capitalize on economic development opportunities associated with Hollywood. After attending this event, community leaders will know how to register their communities with the film office; market their community as a movie-making hot spot; develop streamlined permit processes; and explain to others the positive economic impact the industry has on other communities.

Meetings 'R' Us—How to Run Productive Meetings 1:00 – 4:00 pm

This basic guide to fair and orderly meeting procedures will help keep discussions focused and allow you to accomplish the business on the agenda. This session will focus on council meetings and all of the problems and interruptions that can complicate them, including dealing with difficult people. Quorums and types of motions will be explained and demonstrated.

This is an interactive presentation in which individual concerns and questions will be addressed.

The Michigan Green Communities Challenge— The Workshop

1:00 - 4:00 pm

All Michigan communities are eligible to complete the Michigan Green Communities Challenge, a program designed to reflect the governing body's commitment to adopt policies and programs of energy efficiency and conservation. The Challenge has been created by the League and the Bureau of Energy Systems to provide a step-by-step approach to "Going Green." This workshop offers "walk-through" of the six steps of the Challenge, including the development of a resolution, the assignment of responsibility, suggested method for tracking energy use, needs analysis, and an offering of over 30 possible energy saving and conservation strategies that a community might choose to adopt.

Michigan Association of Municipal Attorney's (MAMA) Municipal Law Program (Full Day)

9:00 am - 4: 00 pm

The MAMA is presenting a full-day workshop designed for attorneys to sharpen their skills in municipal law. The topics will include the foreclosure crisis/abandoned properties/blight; the Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act; avoiding electronic discovery problems in court; the advantages and disadvantages of using mediation rather than litigation; and ethics issues related to conflicts of interest and incompatible offices.



Community Excellence Award "Race for the Cup"

(I) 2008 CEA Voting Booth, Mackinac Island





Field Report

by Caroline Weber Kennedy

Power in Small Places

The great thing about Web 2.0 technology is that there's something for everyone. Everyone can participate and it's virtually free. Size doesn't matter on the web. Even if your population is among the smallest of the small and you have virtually no staff, nearly any local student can set up a Facebook fan page for you—then you are on your way.

Go Viral

In many communities, a Facebook fan page and similar tools are replacing costly newsletters. Resident updates can be posted as they occur, and you control the message. Whether you're fixing a water main, hosting a concert series, receiving an energy grant, or competing in the League's Community Excellence Award "Race for the Cup"—you can get the word out and spread your message virally. For example, I learned about the Boyne Falls (pop. 370) Polish Festival today on Facebook.

Residents without personal computers can access the internet at the public library or perhaps senior center, if you don't have a cyber café. Many schools have interface programs for students to guide seniors and others in the basics of how to access and use web tools to stay better connected and informed.

As a local official, you can check on access in your community. By doing so, you may uncover some unforeseen possibilities. Also, check out a community fan page or two, by going to facebook.com. Set up an account if you don't already have one. I recommend looking at Linden's page. Search: City of Linden, Michigan (Pop. 2,861). Linden gained about 1000 fans in 60 days without doing more than telling a few people it was out there. That is the power of a viral network.

What's an E-Zine?

Another viral web phenomenon is the electronic magazine, or e-zine. Issue Media Group (IMG), originally a two-man partnership, began the Model D e-zine for the Detroit metropolitan area. It was so successful, well, just go to www.issuemediagroup.com and see for yourself. The group has since launched nine more e-zines and is working with the state on an initiative to launch in six more Michigan markets.

The group specializes in delivering positive economic news written by professionals in the local market area with artsy

visuals and imbedded video clips. They reflect and project the best of Michigan's image; not the tired fare provided by traditional media. Who knew? Good news travels fast. Subscription is free, and when you subscribe and share what you like with your 300 best friends on Facebook and Myspace and LinkedIn and Twitter...and they share it with their 300 best friends...well, it's wildly successful!

As of this writing, the Upper Peninsula is poised to be the next of six potential regional Michigan markets to launch (Yes!). One of the neatest things about an e-zine, and maybe the most important for the U.P. and all of Michigan, is the ability of local stakeholders to use this as a recruiting tool. Hospitals, universities, and others have already discovered it's an awesome way to showcase the lifestyle of a community—and people are using it to find their groove. If you were an ER doc, would you rather spend two hours a day commuting, or jump on your mountain bike after work? Most often this honestly depends on opportunities for spouses and kids. An economic e-zine is a way for potential employers, employees, and students to virtually try on a place for size, see how it fits. Find their niche.

Another cool thing about this concept is that a city, village, township, Convention & Visitors Bureau, or Chamber of Commerce can arrange to have their websites refreshed with the kind of positive economic news their members seek, tailoring their own content choices, without having to do all the work.

As a local official, you already know "place" matters. You can convey your sense of place more effectively than ever right now. If you are in one of IMG's target markets, your influence as a community spokesperson may expedite the launch and help



your region's growth efforts. (Contact Paul Schutt, paul@ issuemediagroup.com). And for certain, fire up a free fan page for your community, post some favorite photos and some comments—then sit back and watch what happens. You'll be seriously amazed.

Caroline Weber Kennedy is manager of field operations for the League. You may reach her at 906-428-0100 or ckennedy@mml.org.



Bulletin Board

by Kim Cekola

Clerk of the Year

The Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks (MAMC) presented the annual Clerk of the year awards at its annual conference in Frankenmuth on June 17, 2009. Congratulations to the following clerks:

2009 City Clerk of the Year

Mary A. Kotowski

Clerk, City of St. Clair Shores

2009 Township Clerk of the Year

Terry G. Bennett

Clerk, Canton Charter Township

2009 Village Clerk of the Year

Diane Mensinger

Clerk, Village of Baroda

Happy 50th Wyoming

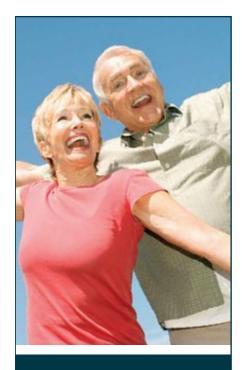
Wyoming, Michigan is celebrating its 50th anniversary as a city. Wyoming is a growing community known for its municipal services, diverse neighborhoods, small schools, recreational sports, commercial businesses and industry. Through the support of its 74,000 residents, the city has made tremendous progress—there have been major upgrades to the infrastructure system, municipal buildings, and parks.

Before it incorporated as a city, the area was known as Wyoming Township. There was actually a move to annex the township into the city of Grand Rapids, but the residents at the time said, "Absolutely not," and in 1959, Wyoming Township officially became the city of Wyoming.

An early landmark decision by city leaders helped the city earn its logo "The City of Vision and Progress." In the 1960s a pipeline was run from Lake Michigan to Wyoming to supply the city and neighboring communities with fresh drinking water. To this day, the water plant remains a state of the art system that produces quality drinking water.

Just as in earlier times, city leadership remains strong today. Mayor Carol Sheets has served Wyoming for several years and is an advocate for causes that create vitality in the city. For example, Mayor Sheets was the driving force encouraging Metropolitan Hospital to build its brand new state of the art LEED certified facility in Wyoming. Wyoming is also proud to have City Manager Curtis Holt in charge of day-to-day operations. Mr. Holt is known for his work throughout the state and most notably for his collaborative efforts in West Michigan.

Wyoming truly lives up to its motto. On August 26 through August 29 the city celebrated the 50 years with a series of events, including a kid's day, parade, western style barbeque, fireworks, a comedy show, barbeque cook off, hospital bed race, and finally, a hot air balloon launch and glow capped off the festivities. Citizens and visitors celebrated 50 years of excellence, and they now look forward to 50 more!



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Kim Cekola is research assistant/publications editor for the League. You may reach her at 734-669-6321 or kcekola@mml.org.



From the Road

by Al McGeehan

St. Joseph

It's true. The older I get, the more I recognize that "everything that I ever really needed to know, I learned in kindergarten." One of those early playground lessons was the concept of cooperation. Learning this back in elementary school enabled us years later to make cooperation a key catalyst and winning formula for municipal success.

Traveling recently in my capacity as the west Michigan regional coordinator for the League, I visited the lakeside city of St. Joseph. The early settlers who plotted the site of "St. Joe" did the townsfolk and visitors a huge favor by locating the city center upon the bluff on the south side of the St. Joseph River. The city overlooks the river, the channel, and the shoreline of what *Parent's Magazine* recently named one of "America's Top Ten Beaches." This is prime Lake Michigan beachfront.

As I drove along the top of the bluff, I was struck by the presence of construction equipment, the large holes being dug, and the substantial amount of dirt being moved. Where my memory told me once stood Silver Beach, a turn of the last century era amusement park, there was no trace. There was a story here, and if anyone could shed light on it, it was Frank Walsh—St. Joseph city manager, facilitator, and promoter. Off I went to a scheduled meeting with Frank and asked him to explain just what I had seen going on between the bottom of the bluff and the shoreline. He told me a most remarkable story. He told me a story about cooperation at its very best.

In 2002, the city of St. Joseph conducted a city-wide citizen survey. The results were quite clear—citizens were concerned about the rapid rate of high-rise lakefront condominium development. This construction, if left solely to market forces, would soon reach the former Silver Beach

amusement park site and literally place a wall and private property between downtown and the lakefront.

In an immediate and direct response to the overwhelming public desire to maintain the view and to create both indoor and outdoor public gathering spaces, a local private/public initiative was launched. I prefer to change the order of the words from the more traditional public/private because if truth be told, the private sector more often than not does the greater part of the "lifting." The private sector deserves top billing in this case as well.

The Schalons and Gasts, both long-time local families, acquired half of the land, and in conjunction with the Whirlpool Corporation, which owned the other half, donated all of the land to the city of St. Joseph. They were joined by the Upton and Whitwam families, the city of St. Joseph (most notably then Mayor Mary Goff), the Curious Kids Museum, the Silver Beach Carousel Society, and the Upton Foundation to create "Silver Beach Development," now valued at nearly \$20 million. The community is dedicated to maintaining the site for both indoor and outdoor use in perpetuity.

On July 9, 2008, the long-anticipated groundbreaking took place. The plan is to construct a world-class attraction that both harkens back to a time long ago when the original Silver Beach was a Michigan shoreline destination. Also, there is the hope that future generations will create wonderful new memories of their own here where the land touches the lake.

Also in July, Delta Airlines chose the city of St. Joseph as a "Great Escape," raving about Silver Beach's 22 sandy acres on Lake Michigan.



Bluffside Construction
THE REVIEW SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009



Artist's rendering of the "Silver Beach Development."

The new Bluffside/Silver Beach, with construction costs of 8.7 million, will include:

- a dynamic Compass Rose Fountain that sprays water 35 feet into the air,
- a recreation of the original old-fashioned boardwalk,
- the Discovery Zone by Curious Kids Museum,
- Michigan's tallest kaleidoscope,

- a Shadowland Ballroom for receptions and outings, and
- the new Silver Beach Carousel with 26 unique horses and 22 menagerie figures.

If cooperation is a life-long lesson that we really did learn way back in kindergarten, it would appear that the folks in St. Joseph learned their lesson well. Their dream will emerge as reality by the end of this summer. Why not visit St. Joseph and witness this successful private/public partnership (or PPP as I like to call it) for yourself?

So, from the road, this is Al McGeehan.



Al McGeehan is the mayor of the city of Holland and the west Michigan regional coordinator for the League. You may reach him at 616-355-1314 or a.mcgeehan@cityofholland.com.

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www.bsasoftware.com



Legal Spotlight

By Sue Jeffers

Jurors, Cell Phones, and Tweets

This column highlights a recent judicial decision or Michigan Municipal League Legal Defense Fund case that impacts municipalities. The information in this column should not be considered a legal opinion or to constitute legal advice.

Facts:

Jury has been sworn in to hear evidence in a trial that lasts for three days. The judge has given instructions to the jury in accordance with Michigan Court Rule 2.516 as amended by order dated June 30, 2009, and effective September 1, 2009. The jurors are permitted to go home at night. The plaintiff in the case is suing for injuries received as a result of a car accident.

Situation One

During a break at the first day of the trial, juror #1 uses her cell phone to call her kids' babysitter to find out how the kids are doing. The babysitter asks how the trial is going. Juror #1 indicates that the trial has just started and has been brought by a badly injured passenger in a vehicle involved in a fatal accident that occurred about a year ago at that "bad" corner on Hitchfield Road.

Question:

Did juror #1 violate an instruction given by the judge under MCR 2.516 as amended?

Answer:

Yes. The amended court rule requires that a court specifically instruct the jurors that they shall not "use a computer, cellular phone, or other electronic device with communication capabilities while in attendance at trial or during deliberation." The court rule specifically permits these devices to be used during breaks or recesses "but may not be used to obtain or disclose

information prohibited in subsection (d) below." The court rule further defines such prohibited information as "information about a party, witness, attorney, or court officer...or news accounts of the case." Had juror #1 restricted her conversation to how the kids were doing, she most likely would not have violated the instruction.

Situation Two

The trial is recessed at the end of day one and the jurors are allowed to go home for the night. Juror #2 is confused about the term "negligence" which has been used by the attorneys and the witnesses during the trial. Juror #2 "Googles" the word "negligence" on his home computer to try to gain a better understanding of the term.

Question:

Did juror #2 violate MCR 2.516 as amended?

Answer:

Yes. The amended court rule requires that a court specifically instruct the jurors not "to use a computer...to obtain information about the case when they are not in court." The court rule further defines "information about the case" as "conducting research on any topics raised or testimony offered by any witness."

Situation Three

Juror #2 (the computer guy) is uncertain of the location of the accident. At home, after day two of the trial, he decides to conduct a MapQuest search to gain a better understanding of how and where the accident took place on Hitchfield Road.

Question:

Did juror #2 violate MCR 2.516 as amended?

Answer:

You guessed right. Yes, he did.

Situation Four

While deliberating in the jury room, juror #3 "tweets" juror #4 on her PDA. The message: "That attorney for the defendant is totally "cool." Juror #6 observes juror #3, realizes that juror #3 is violating the instruction, but does not report his observations to the court.

Question:

Did juror #6 violate MCR 2.516 as amended?

Answer:

Yes. The amended court rule requires that "any juror who observes or has reason to believe that another juror has used an electronic device in violation of this rule shall immediately inform the court of the violation."

Sue Jeffers is associate general counsel for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6306 or sjeffers@mml.org.

State & Federal Affairs Update: Technology

Pushing for Online Publication of Legal Notices

It's certainly not news that Michigan is on hard financial times. The state's budget woes are exacerbated at the local level of government. Many communities have slashed budgets to the point that it's hard to cut any more. Consequently, the League is exploring ways for our members to cut operational costs through legislative reforms—one big one that stands out is allowing public notices to be published online. Current law requires that various legal and public notices be published in a newspaper (you know, those old print things that people used to pick up and read). All joking aside, in general people get their news differently these days. Newspapers are going out of business statewide, and local units of government are being forced to find newspapers outside their community in which to publish legal notices.

The League is currently exploring legislation that would allow legal notices to be published either on

- a local government's website
- a newspaper's website or
- a PEG channel

These options are in addition to posting in the municipal clerk's office.

Not only is this a potentially large cost savings, but it also provides a more effective channel for legal notice. More people are getting their news from the internet and are more likely to see a legal notice online. The notices would come up in searches and would be more permanent than a notice in a printed newspaper. The point of a legal notice is to do just that—provide notice. Allowing publication online would enhance the value of legal notices.

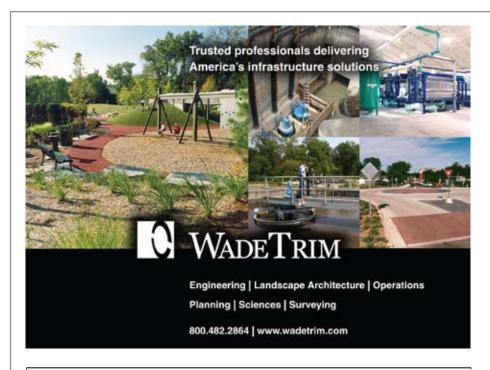
Representative Doug Geiss (D-Taylor) has been leading the charge for communities. This issue has been moving slowly only due to the logistics of figuring out the best way to amend statutes to apply all of the different types of legal notices that are required

to be published. Hopefully bills will be introduced no later than this fall that give communities the flexibility to decide the most effective way to publish legal notices for their citizens.

Broadband Funds Now Available

Funding is being made available through the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Service (RUS) to accelerate broadband deployment in unserved, underserved and rural areas. RUS will make loans and grants for broadband infrastructure projects in rural areas. NTIA will provide grants to fund broadband infrastructure,

public computer centers and sustainable broadband adoption projects. NTIA and RUS will be accepting applications for loans, grants and loan/grant combinations to be awarded by each agency under a single application form. For details on the definitions and requirements of both programs, please refer to the Notice of Funding Availability for Broadband Initiatives and Broadband Technology Program. There are three rounds of funding for the \$7.2 billion program funded through the Recovery Act. Visit broadbandusa.sc.egoc.usda.gov and www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants/.





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ICMA Update

By John McCann

Employer Retirement Health Care Challenges

Public sector employers face a major concern today: Meeting rising retirement health care liabilities in an environment of soaring costs and new financial reporting requirements.

There are two programs designed specifically for public employers who provide health care benefits to retirees: 1) a dedicated funding and investment vehicle designed to help meet employer-promised obligations and 2) a retirement health savings account plan for non-promised benefits.

Dedicated Funding and Investment

Let's look at choice one: Whether you are paying for retiree health costs on a pay-as-you-go basis or pre-funding, you may have funds earmarked in your general fund which will only allow you to earn short term, low-rate investment returns. You now have available a protected and dedicated vehicle for pre-funding these liabilities.

Here's what can be offered to local government employers:

 An exclusive benefit trust for employers to invest retiree health assets.

This protects both you and your retirees. Setting aside assets in a trust rather than in your general fund provides security that the assets will be used specifically for retiree health and not diverted for other purposes.

 An offset to retiree health liabilities on your financial statements.

The Governmental Accounting Standards Board statements on "Other Post-Employment Benefits" require financial statement reporting of retiree health liabilities. These requirements became effective for the largest employers the first fiscal year beginning after June 15, 2006, with subsequent deadlines for small employers. Only assets held in a segregated trust may be used to offset these liabilities.

- An Investment Fund to meet your goals, needs, and tolerance for risk.
- IRS-approved funding vehicle.

Your retiree health funding situation is unique and the solution will depend on your goals and objectives.

Retirement Health Savings Account Plan

Perhaps another solution that could be a fit for you and your employees is a retirement health savings account plan. This is a tax-free investment vehicle dedicated to funding health care expenses in retirement. It operates as a Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA), with mandatory contributions. An HRA is an employer-funded account that may be used by participants, their spouses, and dependents, to pay for medical expenses not otherwise covered by a medical benefits program. Assets that are not used in one year may be carried forward and used in a future year. The account can continue to be used by participants after retirement, and may be used by the spouse and dependents after the death of a participant.

Look at what the retirement health savings account plan can offer for you and your employees:

Employer

- Savings—Contributions made by the employer are exempt from FICA taxes, saving the employer up to 7.65 percent of the amount contributed. In addition, they are not subject to unemployment taxes.
- Flexibility—The employer can design its plan to best fit the needs of employee groups, including collective bargaining units.
- No unfunded liability—Existing retiree medical programs offered either through a retirement system or by the employer directly, may burden the employer with unfunded liabilities. Unlike defined benefit retiree health care programs, the plan does not create an unfunded liability for the employer.

Employee

- **Tax-free contributions**—Employee contributions are exempt from FICA taxes.
- **Tax-free growth**—Contributions are invested and earnings grow tax-free.
- **Investment options**—Employee chooses from a wide selection of mutual funds.
- Transfer of assets—Upon the employee's death, funds are passed along to his/her surviving spouse and/or dependents.
- Carryover balance—Unused balances can carry over from year to year.
- Spouse and/or dependents—Upon attaining benefit eligibility, the assets can be used by the employee, his/her spouse, and/or dependents to pay for qualified medical expenses on a tax-free basis.

The plan is offered pursuant to a formal private letter ruling issued by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and will need to comply with all provisions of IRS Revenue Rulings for Health Reimbursement Arrangements.

The following features were addressed in a private letter ruling issued by the IRS in connection with a municipality adopting the plan in 1999:

Participation

The employer decides which employee group(s) is required to participate.

Contribution

The employer decides which types of contribution are suitable.

 Direct employer contributions—Contributions made directly by the employer in either fixed dollar amounts or as a percentage of compensation.

- Vacation and sick leave contributions—A pre-determined schedule established by the employer or collective bargaining unit (e.g., 50 percent of vacation and sick leave contributions at retirement).
- Pre-tax employee contributions

A pre-determined schedule established by the employer or collective bargaining unit. These contributions are pre-tax, resulting in tax savings for the employer and employee.

Additional Plan Design Options

- Vesting—The employer may adopt a vesting schedule for direct employer contributions (e.g., 100 percent at five years of continued service).
- Forfeiture—The employer determines how forfeited funds will be applied (e.g., upon the participant's death, a participant's non-vested funds can remain in the trust to be reallocated on an equal dollar basis among all plan participants).
- Benefit eligibility—Eligibility may be any combination of retirement, separation from service, and age (e.g., at retirement or at age 55).
- Medical benefit—All medical expenses permitted by the IRS for medical expense deductions (e.g., all medical expenses eligible under IRC Section 213 other than direct long-term care expenses).
- Effective date of the plan—The employer can give the plan an effective date that matches a bargaining agreement or that coincides with a funding cycle (e.g., May 1, 20XX).

There are solutions to meet the retirement health care challenges you face. For more information call John McCann at ICMA-RC, 1-800-825-0765.

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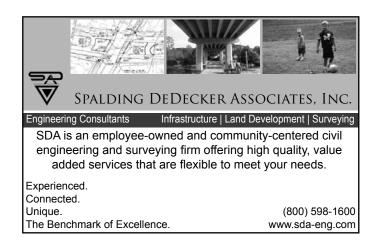


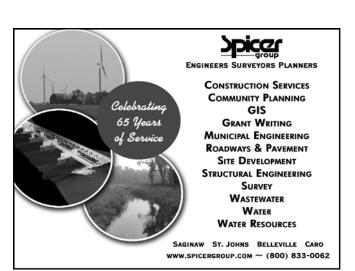


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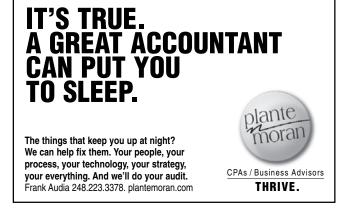
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The Ethics Handbook for Michigan Municipalities

The League is pleased to announce the publication of an important resource for local government officials who are considering adopting or revising ethics standards in their community. The Ethics Handbook for Michigan Municipalities is the culmination of a comprehensive effort by the Ethics Roundtable of the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys, chaired by DeWitt City Attorney Dan Matson, and the Michigan Municipal League. The handbook will be a powerful resource for municipal leaders to engage in community dialogue to choose the best approach locally for maintaining high ethical standards in Michigan municipalities. The Municipal League Foundation provided essential funding to assist with the publication and distribution of the handbook.

The handbook describes the various approaches to establishing local ethics standards, gives samples of all the topics covered in existing ordinances, and describes how to implement standards in your community.

Inside:

Definitions for an Ethics Ordinance

Fundamental Standards of Conduct

Consequences for Violating the Ethics Ordinance

Enforcement and Administration

For an electronic copy of the book, please visit www.

Ethics Handbook for Michigan Municipalities

Fingerity > fair dealing > responsibility > accountability > openess

Finding municipal legger

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mml.org. For additional information, please contact William C. Mathewson, general counsel for the League, at 734-662-3246 or wmathewson@mml.org.



Municipal Q&A

Coordinated by Mary Charles

A question of a different sort...legal opinion vs opinionated

Many may think we are opinionated, however, nothing in this column—or any information provided by the Inquiry Service—should be considered as a legal opinion. The information is only a point from which to begin discussions among staff and council and, most importantly, the municipal attorney.

Over the years of answering questions from members, we've dealt with a number of issues and from time to time we've had to issue revisions, clarifications, and/or corrections. Sometimes it is the result of changes in legislation, sometimes a different interpretation after discussion with others and, sometimes, we're just plain wrong. And we're glad to know you are reading the column carefully because that is usually where the needed correction originates.

Probably the most frequent bit of advice we give—usually repeated several times within any given conversation or column—is "contact your municipal attorney." One reason for this is that the League as an association is unable to render legal opinions.

The second—and perhaps more important reason—is that with 533 cities and villages in Michigan (and now 5 urban townships as members) there is no way League staff could possibly have a working knowledge of each of your charters, ordinances, council rules and local issues. Your municipal attorney does.

The third and unarguably the most important reason is that I am not an attorney. The "wisdom" in this column, if there is any, is gathered from the experiences and issues voiced by the members and from discussions with experts in a variety of specialties.

Now that Michigan
Contractor & Builder
magazine has gone
out of publication, is there
an alternative for posting our
infrastructure projects for bid?

To fill this void, the Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Association (MITA) created a website called Advertisement for Bids. The website is free of charge and allows municipalities to submit infrastructure requests that are immediately emailed out to the entire MITA membership, as well as any non-MITA members who are registered with their system. The website is open to all potential bidders and will provide registered users an email notification when new projects are posted.

To register for and view MITA Advertisements for Bids go to www.mitaads.com. For more information about MITA Advertisements for Bids contact Doug Needham, director of technical services, at dougneedham@mi-ita.com or Stacey Willis, web/technical coordinator, at staceywillis@mi-ita.com, or call the MITA office at 517-347-8336. (The above information has been provided by MITA.)

Is a "committee of the whole" considered to be a meeting of the council under the Open Meetings Act? Do we need to publish the notice and keep minutes?

Yes to both questions. Often referred to as "work sessions" many communities find meetings of the "committee as a whole" a useful tool to address long-term and ongoing matters. Regardless of what they are called, if there is deliberation toward a decision, they most likely fall under the definition of a meeting in the Open Meetings Act and must be posted and minutes taken. And, the meetings must be open to the public except for those issues that by law are permitted to be addressed in closed session.

Our One-Pager Plus (http://www.mml. org/pdf/opp/opp_work_sessions.pdf) deals with several common issues or questions not as "legal" issues but rather as policy or decision-making tools. I hope you find it useful.

As always, and particularly with Open Meetings Act issues, remember our cardinal rule—"check with your municipal attorney."

Mary Charles is a research analyst for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6322 or mcharles@mml.org.







The village of Tekonsha, Michigan, population approximately 750, may be described as small in size, but big in character. With tree-lined streets and the comforting feeling of "home," this picture perfect postcard of a community benefits all who grace its path.

First settled in 1836, our uniquely named town honors the settlers that came before us by deriving "Tekonsha" from the name of a revered Pottawatomie Indian Chief called Tek-on-qua-sha. Settling along the St. Joseph River, our first residents realized the potential and benefits of homesteading in south central Michigan. Tekonsha also evolved into a very popular halfway point between Detroit and Chicago for travelers of both train and road.

Being a present-day small community doesn't mean that there is a lack of industry and progress. Tekonsha boasts an industrial park, which houses businesses that distribute products throughout the country. For over 120 years, a lumberyard and food company have called Tekonsha their home. We offer banking, healthcare, food services, retail, hardware, vehicle services and the potential to expand in many more business avenues.

The families of our community have benefited from our village's educational system. Tekonsha community schools are fully accredited and provide the advantages of small class size and personalized educational instruction.

The village and township governments have provided many positive attributes for their residents, by providing a public water system, and a lagoon sewer system. There are two public parks enjoyed by individuals and families, which also serve as the backdrop for an annual Durham Park Festival, celebrating the park and the plans envisioned for the future.

An impressive volunteer fire department proudly stands by to aide when needed and there are three churches to provide spiritual support and a helping hand when called upon.

The heart of any community is always the people who dwell there. The residents of Tekonsha have proven time and time again that your neighbor's helping hand is just a step away. A passing reminder of that caring custom is reflected on the signs posted at the village limits, that sum it all up by stating "Tekonsha—The Little Town with the Big Heart."